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SERMON

Preached before His Grace,

GEORGE

EARL of

MELVIL,

Their Majesties High Commissioner,

AND

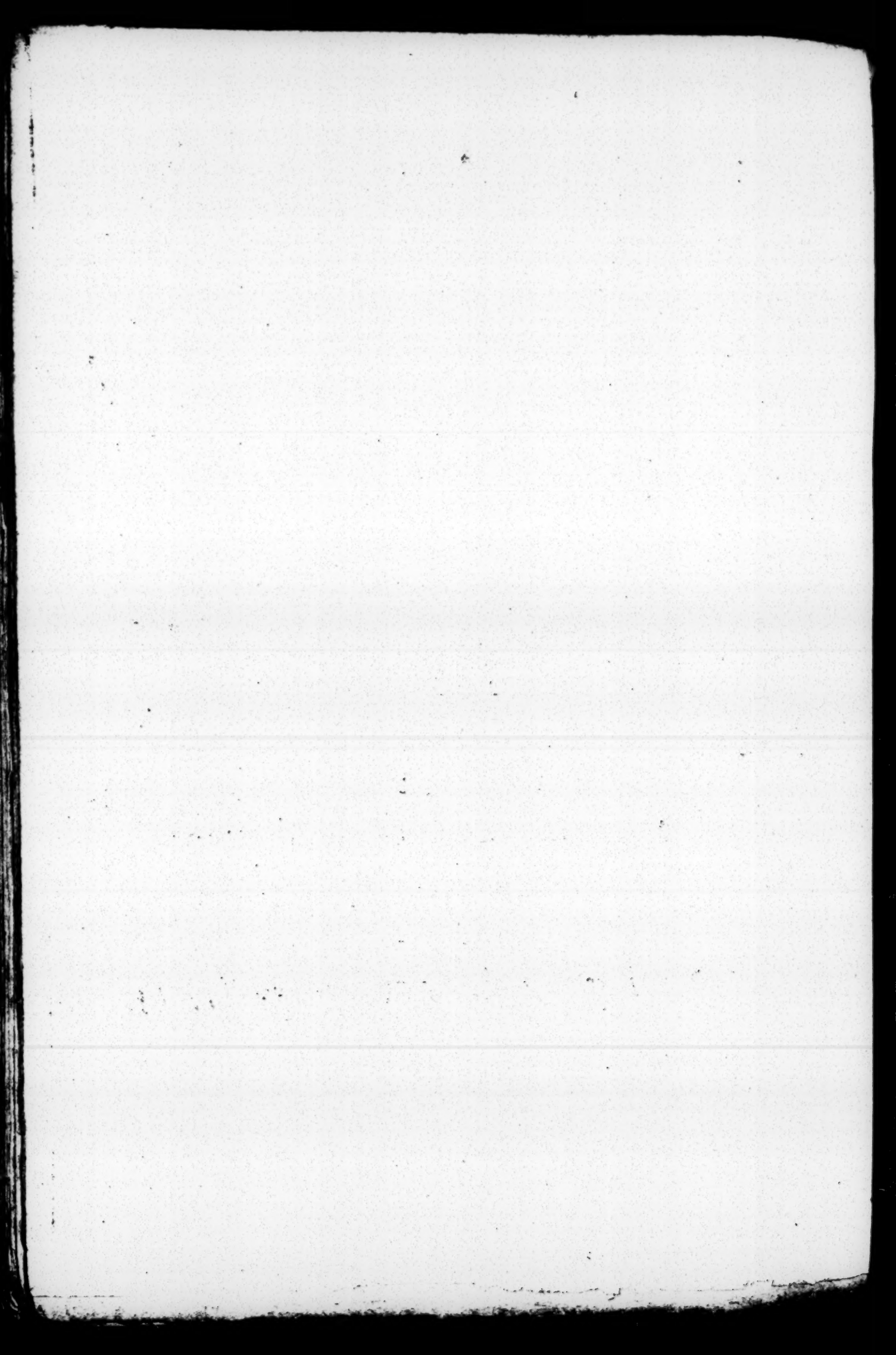
The Nobility, Barons, and Burrows, Members of the High Court of Parliament.

In the Parliament-House, upon Sunday, May 11. 1690.

By John Spalding, Minister at Kirkcudbright.

E D I N B U R G H,

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1 CHRON. 12. 32.

And the Children of Issachar, which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do-----

THis Text bears an excellent Character of a party, who came with others in a very critical juncture to Hebron, to assist in making David King, Saul now being out of the way, and the time of fulfilling the promise to David, being now at hand; Wherein you have (1.) A description of the party thus Characterized, 1. From their Tribe, they were Children of Issachar, a Tribe whose Motto was, *a strong ass couching down between two burdens*, Gen. 49. 14. discovering their Disposition, strength, and employment about worldly concerns. *The Lord will bring off people from their worldly affairs, when hath service for them.* 2. From their Number, they were but 200 that came to assist in the work. *Tho people be at some disadvantages, yet ought they not to withdraw their hand from the Lord's work.* And 3. From their Station, all of them had command over their Brethren, either in a Civil or Military capacity. *Strong obligations lyes upon those in places of Trust and Command, to put their hand to the Lord's work.* (2.) You have the Character it self, which beyond many others they did bear; They had understanding of the times: Where we are to consider, what is meant by *times*? By times here is not meant properly that which Philosophers call the measure of motion, by first and last; But figuratively, the state and condition of times, or these Providences, Affairs, Changes and Vicissitudes that fall out in time, *Esth. 1. 13.* And 2. What this understanding of the times is? It were too narrow a sense to restrict it, either to that physical and Astrological knowledge, which they had of the Stars and motions of the Heavens, teaching them the fit Seasons, (they being for most part Husbandmen) of sowing and reaping, &c. Or to that Historical and Chronological understanding, which they had of the times that were past, or of right computing and ordering the times of celebrating their solemn Feasts; or to that military knowledge, which they were endowed with of the fit seasons of going forth to, and right management of their Wars and Battels: But it hath reference, 1. To that moral prudence and policy, whereby they knew the nature, tendency, and series, with their fittest seasons of the present posture of affairs. And, 2. To that spiritual wisdom and understanding, whereby they were directed to the discovery and right improvement of the intricat providences of their time, which seemed to be greatly perplexed with singular intricacies and rotations, and particularly of the present dispensation of making David King. And 3. In the Text you have

the effect and result of this gift of their understanding of the times. It was contributive to the discovery and practice of their own and all *Israels* present duty to know what *Israel* ought to do, whether as a body Politick, or Ecclesiastick.

The words that I have chosen for the Subject of this Sermon, are these, *Which were men that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do* Wherein you have. 1. A supposition of two Truths, the handling of which is now my present intendment. 1. That there are some special Times and Providences which may pass over a Church or Kingdom, *Ecccl. 3. 17.* 2. That these signal Times and Providences are oft-times very intricate and difficult to understand *Ezek. 1. 16.* 2. A position of other two Doctrines. As 1. That it is a necessary duty, and commendable qualification, to understand the Times that a Church or Kingdom may pass under. 2. That the right discerning of these times contribute much to discover unto, and direct people in the right timing and management of their present duty. The prosecution of these two Truths, is my present work.

Doct. 1. That it is a necessary duty, and commendable qualification, to understand the singular times or providences that may pass over a Church or Kingdom, *Ecccl. 8. 5. A wise mans heart discerneth both time and judgment.* Method requires, that in the prosecution of this Truth, I should first give you the grounds of it. 2. What are these things which in times we are to study mainly to understand. And 3. What way we may best come to the understanding of times.

I. The grounds of this Doctrine are 1. God hath expressly commanded, that we make serious reflections upon his singular providences, whether of mercy or of judgment, *Psal. 66. 5. Come and see the works of God, he is terrible in his doings to the children of men.* And when the seven Seals are opened, *Rev. 6. 1.* A thundering voice is heard, crying, *Come and see;* and how many Beholds are prefixed in the Scripture to his signal steps and goings amongst a people? *Exod. 3. 2. Behold the bush burned with fire, and the bush was not consumed.* And *Job* is in a special way called to this duty, *Job 37. 14. Harken unto this, O Job, stand still and consider the wondrous works of God.* 2. The Lord is sore displeased with, and uttereth severe threatnings against a people that are not in this duty, *Psal. 28. 5. Because they regard not the works of the Lord, nor the operations of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.* It is an high contempt of God, when he travellet amongst a people in signal and singular steps of Providence, not to observe or take notice of his goings, and lays them open to that sad challenge, whereby the Lord ranks them below brutes, *Isai. 1. 3. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his masters crib, but my people do not know, and Israel doth not consider.* Without this knowledge of the times, the Lord loses his due praises at our hands for how can we praise him when we cannot discern his loving kindness, why will ye be so foolish and unjust as to rob God of the Glory due to him of all his Works, by not studying to understand them. *Psal. 107.* contains a record of his

wondrous Works, and at the close of every Section, there is an Exclamation, *O that men would praise the Lord, &c.* And the last verse concludes, *Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even they shall understand the loving kindness of the Lord.* 4. As the Lord, by neglect of this Duty, loses his Praises, so we lose the benefit of Times and Providences, if we do not understand them; for by his Works, as well as by his Word, he causes his people to profit. And without this discerning of the Times, we want a great part of the Food of our Faith, the exercise of Patience, and occasion of serious Contemplation and wonderment. *Psal. 74. 14. Thou brakest the heads of Leviathan in pieces, and gavest him to be meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness.* 5. Without this knowledge of the Times and Providences, ye cannot well know how to order your Addresses to God in Prayer and Supplication about them, and your own circumstances under them. *Psal. 109. 4.* For the right understanding of times will afford you many Articles for your Prayers, prompt you to plead them, and fit you for discerning the Lord's returns. For when the floods of great Waters are like to go over David, he says, *Psal. 32. 6.* For this shall every one that is godly call upon thee, in a time when thou mayest be found. And 6. It is a most pleasant and ravishing exercise, to be studying to understand the Times, and the attainments of the Saints this way fill their Souls with unspeakable delight: It's one of the Fruits of Christ that are sweet to their Taste, *Psal. 111. 2.* The works of the Lord are sought out of all these that take pleasure in them. What a Heaven upon Earth will this advance thee unto? O! what pleasure to perceive the Wise Counsellor, and excellent Worker against contrary Winds and Tides from men, steering all to the Harbour of his own praise, the exalting of his Son, and the happiness of his Church, and secretly carrying on these ends, while men are driving quite contrary designs, how he promotes his designs, by picking men opposing them; and enlarges and gathers his Church, by their scattering of it. And O! what satisfaction as to thy own particular case, to behold and discern the Lord, sometimes lifting thee up. (*Psal. 102, 10.*) and sometimes casting thee down again, sometimes laying you low, as free among the dead, and again setting your feet upon a Rock, and making them like hinds feet, so that ye walk on high places; sometimes enlarging you and your steps under you, and again straitning you, that ye walk as with fetters; now afflicted, and again delivered, wounded and cast down, and in three dayes healed and lifted up; these are part of his wayes, which cannot but be pleasure to us to search into and contemplate. Yea, how delighting must it be, to begin that exercise here, that shall continue in Heaven; to view and remember with delight, the various and wonderful methods that the wise Lord took in bringing you there; and while you are on Earth, to be transported to have your Conversation in Heaven, or to have a View of Heaven brought unto your Soul. This cannot be but an unspeakable delight.

II. What:

II. What are these things in times that we are to search into, and study to understand, (1.) We are to search into, and to understand the hid and secret Spring of the Lord's wise and powerful hand in directing, permitting and ordering all these things that fall out in time. *The wheel* (Ezek. 1. 16.) that is *within the wheel, and the hand that is under the wings of the living creatures*, as in a Clock, or Watch, we see the Hand, but we see not the secret Spring within, that moves all, and turns about the direct Retrograd, and transverse motions of the Wheels to the discovery of the hour; for Times and Providences may be obvious in their actions, second Causes, and the effects they produce; but we are in the dark many times: 1. As to the Power that acts. 2. As to the Reasons and Ends he hath before him. And 3. As to the Mind and Disposition where with he moves them; these ly hid under ground, as matter of inquiry to the serious and most discerning, whose eyes are in their head. (2.) We are to search into, and understand the *Sins* of the times, that we may confess and mourn over them, escape from them, and get them removed. *Jer. 9. 12. Who is the wise man that may understand this, for what the land perisheth, and is burnt up like a wilderness, so that none passeth through? As to which ye are to understand; 1. That as there hath been many Prophets that have seen vain and foolish things for us, (Lam. 2. 14.) and have not discovered our iniquity, to turn away our captivity, but have seen for us false causes of banishment. So the Lords People are often in the dark, as to the grounds of the Lord's controversie with them, and frequently put to that question, (Job. 9. 10.) Shew me wherefore thou contendest with me? 2. That there are no sins which have brought down the wrath of God upon any Nation, but it hath been found in our Skirts, and so cannot rationally expect that he will bear with that in one People, which he hath punished so severely in another; but that as in Isa. 10. 11. As he hath done unto Samaria and her Idols, so will he do unto Jerusalem, (Scotland) and her Idols. We may see the dead carcasses of other sinners, and sinful Nations lying in our way, for the same sins we are guilty of, which may make us halt in the course of our backsliding and defection. And 3. If we should condescend upon the particular sins of our times, as the contempt of the glorious Gospel, *Zech. 7. 11. 12.* Our Idolatry *Ezek. 14. 5. and chap. 20. 16.* Perfidie, *Deut. 29. 24, 25.* Lukewarmness and Indifferency in Religion. *Rev. 3. 15.* Oppression, *Ezek. 8. 17. &c.* It would be fitter for a Volum than a Sermon, to enumerat them, and therefore I shall satisfie my self with saying, as in *Amos 1. 9.* For three transgressions of Tyrus (Scotland) and for four I will not turn away the punishment thereof, because, &c. and that in *Jer. 30. 14.* For the multitude of thine iniquities, and because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee. 3. Ye are to study to understand the Signs and tokens of the times. *Matth. 16. 3.* O ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky, but ye cannot discern the signs of the times; and that both the good and bad signs of the times, I will not mention the bad signs further than*

(by way of the contrary) they may be comprehended in the good ; but shall mention only these good and promising Signs of our times, to be studied and understood, *Matth. 24. 22. When the fig-tree casteth her blossoms, we know that summer is near.* As 1. It is a good and promising Token of a time, when there is a melting and mourning frame amongst the Lord's people for abounding Iniquity, *Jer. 31. 9.* When people come with weeping and Supplications, asking the way to Zion ; which Sign is so to be understood, 1. As that *though our iniquities testify against us, (Isai. 48. 11) yet will he do for his Names sake.* 2. That which is wanting in our mourning frame before our Deliverance, may come alongst with it, or follow after it. And 3. That his Sovereign grace may prove as the dew that waiteth not for man, or his frame, but magnifieth it self, in delivering of a sinful and indisposed, yea ill-disposed People. 2. When there is any measure of desirable Harmony and Union in a State or Church, and every one as one stick of Bands in the hands of the Lord, and *with one consent, (Zeph. 3. 9.) And with one shoulder, (Amos 9. 11.) Help up with the fallen tabernacle.* And ye are to understand this Sign so, as 1. Though people may be of different and imperfect Light and Sentiments in some things (*1 Cor. 13. 9.*) Yet in the main Truths and Concerns of the Church and Nation, they may, and ought to be as one man, (*1 Thess. 5. 13.*) Not striving who shall hold the Candle, lest by their struggling they put it out. 2. That the wisdom of God may out-wit the Devil and his Instruments, in making the differences among his People, not only prove the mean of Discovery of the hearts and principles of many, (*Luke 2. 35.*) But to be the occasion of their more close uniting among themselves, and this fire of Division to separat Heterogenials, and congregat Homogenials. And 3. That this Union and Concord, as it is the Ornament and Beauty of a Society, set in Majesty, (*Ezek. 7. 20.*) and makes them comely as *Jerusalem* ; and as it is the strength and safety of a Corporation, a shaft of Arrows not being broken so easily as single ones : so it is a Terror unto Enemies, and makes them terrible as any Army with banners, and occasions Enemies to faint in their opposition, saying, (as in the primitive times) *Behold, how they love one another.* And 3. It is a good Sign of a time when there are some hopeful beginnings of Good breaking up, resembling the voice upon the top of the Mulberry trees, *2 Sam. 5. 24. And the little cloud like a mans hand seen upon the top of mount Carmel, 1 Kings 18. 44.* Which Sign is so to be understood, as 1. We are not to despise the day of small things, *Zech. 4. 10.* But 2. To look upon them as steps of, and so many steps towards his VVork, his strange VVork, his Act, his strange Act, which shall make us all cry with shouting, *grace, grace* unto it. And 3. As God mercifully engaging some in a good Cause and Course, to the saving of their Souls, building of their Houses, and comfort at Death, he hath by these beginnings, wherein ye have been Instrumental, happily brought you over to his side, and I desire to be perswaded, that he will never suffer you to retreat ; which if you do, he hath a witness against you

you in these things, in your own Consciences, that ye condemn your selves for these things that now ye allow. 4. Ye are to observe and understand the dark Providences of the times, with reference both to Mercy and Judgment. *Ecc. 8. 5. A wise mans heart discerneth both time and judgment.* And 1. With respect unto mercy, observe and understand, how the Lord doth great works by small means, *Deborah*, *Judge 5.* A weak woman, the worm *Jacob*, *Isai. 41. 14* Threshing mountains, Ram-horns, *Joshua*, 6. 4. bringing down high walls, a Straw in the hand of Omnipotency, will do great things. 2. By unexpected means, bringing Instruments from afar, not thought upon, to do service to his Church, *Exod. 3. 10.* From their common and ordinary Employments, as *Gideon*, (*Judges 6. 11.*) from the Threshing-floor, and from his Enemies, as *Cyrus* (*Isai. 45. 1.*) To loose the loins of kings, and break the gates of brass, and elevating them above their ordinary sphere and ability, to do exploits, making the feeble among them as *David*, (*Zech. 12. 8.*) And the weak as an Angel of God. Yea from the furnace of Affliction, *Joseph* brought out of Prison to Rule, and as many of you are lately come from your Bonds to the Benish. 3. By no visible mean, *Zech. 4. 6.* Not by power, or by might, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord. 4. By contrary means, that would seem to destroy, Clasp and Spittle, that of themselves tend to mar the sight, yet applied by Christ (*Job. 9. 6.*) heal blind eyes; by affliction, to bring about the Deliverance of his Church; by darkness to bring light, and by scattering to gather. Yea, 5. by means that have no rational or probable connexion with the effect, what rational connexion can be imagined betwixt the King's not getting sleep, calling for a Book to divert him, &c. *Esther 6. 1, 2.* and the Deliverance of the Church; yet the Lord brings forth their Deliverance that way: a Drummer in his drunkenness Ringing the Town Bell in *Beziers* in France, giving the Besieged Protestant the alarm, just when their enemies were assaulting them, was an observable Providence. 2. How the Lord by very impressions, and apprehensions upon the Spirits of enemies, makes them fly when none pursueth, and one to chase a thousand, and two to put ten thousand to flight, a famous instance whereof ye have in *Judges 7. 13.* A Dream of a fellow, that a barley cake was tumbled into the Host of the *Midianites*, makes them all run crying, this is no other but the sword of the Lord, and of *Gideon*; the Sun shining upon the Waters, put an impression upon the *Moabites* to their ruin, *2 Kings. 3. 22.* &c. which makes the overthrow of enemies so easie, (whereof we in our time have had pregnant proof) that *Nahum 3. 12.* Their strong Cities fall as ripe figgs into the mouth of the eater, and their valiant captains melt like grasshoppers in a sunny day. 3. How the Lord makes things fall out, contrary to what his enemies design, and in all human appearance may expect. The Lord as *Isa. 24. 25.* turning wise men backward and evidencing, that the deceived (*Job. 12. 16.*) and deceiver are his, and turning the Counsels of *Achithophels* to foolishness. As for instance that the People of *Israel* would have a King, to put them in a happy condition, like other

Nations (1 Sam, 8. 5.) But that King destroyed their Nation, and David
 moved to bear up the Pillars thereof. The Church banished from *Jerusalem*, on
 purpose to destroy it, *Acts* 11. 19. 20. And was a very probable mean to effectuate
 the design, but that banishment of the Church, proved the preservation of the Church,
 when *Jerusalem* was destroyed. And *Paul* bound that he might not preach. *Phil.*
 12. But his Bonds do preach, and tend to the furtherance of the Gospel. 4.
 How the Lord brings down his Enemies, when their strength is greatest, their
 combinations strongest, and their Confidences highest, *Nah.* 1, 10. *When they*
are drunken as the drunkard (with success) and folded together as thorns, (by
combinations, confederacies and strength) then shall they be devoured as stubble
dry. Yea 5. How the Lord brings the darkest hour upon a Church, immedi-
 ately before her delivery, and makes her Furnace hotter in the very carrying on of
 her deliverance, As faired with the Church in *Esther's* time, and in *Babylon*. And
 that is a strange word in *Mic.* 4. 10. *Be in pain and labour to bring forth, for ye*
shall go to Babylon, and there be delivered, making their light to shine out of obscur-
ity. And I may allude to that Word, *Isa.* 21. 11. watch-man what of the night?
 watch-man, what of the night? The watch-man said, *The morning cometh, and*
the night. There may be a dark Night before the Morning, and even darkest
 immediately before the break of day. And 2. Ye are to understand these dark
 providences, with reference to Judgements, as well as mercies. *Jer.* 8, 7. *The*
ark in the heavens knoweth her appointed times, and the turtle, and the crane, and
the swallow observe the time of their coming, but my people know not the Judgment
of the Lord. And as to this, ye are to understand, 1. That the Lord with variety
 of outward Judgements, oftentimes smites a sinful People, he hath many sickles to cut
 down a Nation, when they are ripe, by abounding, and being impudent, and ob-
 stinate in sin, *Joel.* 3. 13. *Zech.* 5. 1. And in his Sovereignty, he changes them
 at his pleasure. And in order to this, he fitteth instruments to execute his wrath,
 and prepares them for doing his pleasure. *Isa.* 13. 3. *I have called my sanctified*
ones, I have commanded my mighty ones for mine anger; and proportions the
judgments some way to the sin of a people, that they who run may read, for what
the Lord smiteth them, when they that spoil are spoiled, &c. 2. That the Lord
 sometimes insensibly consume a People, by spiritual and invisible Judgements,
 sending a moth among them, *Hos.* 5. 12. *I will be as a moth to the house of Judah,*
and as a rottenness to the house of Israel. And making gray hairs to be here and
 there upon them, (*Hos.* 7. 9.) tho they knew it not. This is worthy of our search,
 and studying to understand, how the Lord secretly and insensibly, by Spiritual
 Judgments wastes a Nation; Judgments come, and the noise of their feet is not
 heard, they are effectually, tho insensibly destroyed. O strange! A People slain,
 and the sword not seen, and the shot not heard, but in his wrath they pine away,
 by his deserting of them, *Mic.* 3. 4. *By hardning their hearts, blinding their*
eyes, and fatning their hearts, Isa. 6. 9. *By giving them up to spiritual barren-*
ness,

nels, Ezek. 47. 11. And to strong delusions, 2 Thes. 2. 12. And by letting them
 run on in sin, without reproof or correction, Isa. 1. 5. Hos. 4. 14. And by
 many other spiritual plagues, which makes the case sader, that not only, as I have
 said, they consume insensibly, but they are both sins and Judgements, Amos. 4.
 Yes (if not timously prevented by turning to the Lord) they may prove the
 sad earnest of hell and damnation, as in that forecited place, 2 Thes. 2. 12. *That*
they all might be damned who believed not the truth. And 3. It's worthy of your
 study to understand, how that *Moth*, at last (if a People prove incorrigible
 turns into a *Lyon*, and a *Leopard*, Hos. 13. 7. *Therefore I will be unto them*
a Lyon, and as a Leopard by the way will I observe them: And how the Lord
 outward and visible strokes destroyes a Nation, Jer. 14. 12. *I will consume them*
by the sword, and by famine, and by the pestilence. (5.) You are to labour
 understand the great ends and designs, that the Lord is driving on, by these times
 and providences that pass over a People; And if ye observe narrowly, ye will
 find, 1. That by all these Providences, in the latter days he is removing these things
 that are (or as some read, it may be) *shaken*, as of things that are made, that
 the things which cannot be shaken, may remain. 2. That he is making way for the
 utter ruin & fall of Antichrist and Popery, in all the forms of it, that not so much
 as a rag of that whore may remain, Rev. 18. 2. And his Church sing a triumph
Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. And 3. That he is carrying on the estab-
 lishment of Zion, upon her right Basis and Foundation, Isa. 14. last v, *Who*
shall one answer the messenger of the nations, That the Lord hath founded Zion,
and the poor of the people shall trust in (or as in the Heb. betake themselves unto)
 And if these great Ends be carried on by Providences, It matters not much, to
 you, and I, and others, miss our own particular, and self Ends. And 6. I would
 propose to you the understanding of the *Times*, which the Text relates unto
 And if there be any paralell betwixt it and our Times, it is not I, but
 Scripture, and Providence, the great Comentary on Scripture, that hath made
 it. And if ye will search into the case of the Text, you will find,
 That *Saul David's Father* in Law was now dead, and the Throne vacant,
Abner, and his Command that he had over the Tribes, was now removed out
 the way, by the Lords remarkable hand, 2 Sam. 3. 30. 33. 3. David was now
 magnified among the People by his victories over the *Philistines*, his pious car-
 age, his Z-al for the ark of the Lord, and against Idolatry, and for the public
 good of the Land, v. 18. of this chap. 4. The time of the Promise, for making
 David King, was now at hand to be fulfilled, 2 Sam. 3, 9, 10. 5. There was
 a Spirit of Zeal for this work, moving all the Tribes, they flock one after another
 to the work, as here in this chap. v. 22. 38. It's said, *They came all with a perfect*
heart, to make David King over Israel, and all the rest also of Israel were of a
 heart to make David King, until a. v. 22. *They were a great host, as the host of Goliath*
 6. There were both open and secret Enemies to this great work, of making David
 King, if ye will consider what is said, in 1 King, 12, 16. and in v. 17. of this chap.

And 7. When ever *David* came to the Crown, he gave orders to bring back the Ark to its right Place. And in the following chap. to this Text. ye see what orders, after consultation with the Leaders and the Captains, he issues forth, to bring again the Ark of God, for (says he) *we inquired not at it in the days of Saul.* Yes 8. In this Juncture, there were that gave the Ark a wrong touch, which kindled the Anger of the Lord against him, see v. 9. of the chap. next to this Text. And I must in the 9. and last place add, That when the Ark was brought home, several remarkable things followed, As *David* the King his carnal fear, to bring it to his own City, v. 12, 13. of the following Chapter. The great confirmation of the Kingdom upon him, by the Lords signal appearance in his behalf, according to his Promise, by forreign Confederacies and kindness, by a numerous Family, and by victories over his Enemies, As in 1 Chron. 14, 1, 2, 10, 14. &c. And at last, after several stops and lets, the Ark is brought with shouting, unto its own place the City of *David*, 1 Chron. 15. 28. And the called and appointed Officers of the Lord are set to wait on it, and no soul fingers to touch it, 1 Chron. 16, 37. &c. And then, and not till then cometh peace, and all the people return to their houses, and *David* returned to bless his house, v. 43. There are many other things in times, that ye ought to understand, but least I exceed the bounds of a Sermon, I forbear to mention them, and comes to the last thing I proposed in the method of this Doctrine.

III. What way may People best come to understand the Times? *Answ.* 1. By Consulting the Word of God, which is best the Key to unlock Providences and Times, to the law and to the testimony, Isa. 8. 20. And as *Asaph*, when he was puzzled with a singular Providence, Psal. 73, 16, 17. He went into the Sanctuary to be resolved, and there was cleared as to the Times and Providences he was trysted with. The Lords voice cryeth unto the city, (Mic. 6. 9.) and the man of wisdom shall know thy name. 2. Labour to have the work of Grace and Renovation thorow and clear without Clouds, for the Image of God in man is of such a nature, that it hath something in it answering (as Face to Face in a Glass) to all the revealed Will of God, and to its great interpreter Times and Providences; and the more powerful and lively Grace be in its Actings, the more insight you will have both in his Word and Works, Psal. 25. 14. the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, &c. 3. Compare former times and Providences in their Nature and Circumstances with present Times and Dispensations, and that will give more Light in what seems hid and obscure to you, Psal. 77. 5. Consider the days of old, and the years of antient times, and bring them home to the present Case, and it may help you to know the Vision, Mic. 6. 5 Remember from Shittim to Gilgal, that ye may know the righteousness of the Lord. 4. Imploy by Prayer Christ Jesus to open the Book of Times & Providences to you, for he is worthy to do it, Rev. 5. 2 When ye go forward and he is not there, and backward but cannot perceive him, on the left hand where he doth work, but cannot behold him, and on the right hand, but ye can
B 2

not see him; then ply the Duty of Prayer, for the right management of that Duty hath given great Light to the Saints in dark and difficult times, *Psal. 77. 16* when the Lords way is in the sea, and his paths in the deep waters, yet Prayer will be a mean to discover his goings, and lay open his mind in them. 5. If ye would rightly understand Times, beware of Prejudice, and rash Censuring of Times and Providences, as if ye were wiser than God, or could amend what he hath done; who art thou O man that chargest God foolishly, and findest fault with the Almighty, the wise Counsellor and excellent Worker. Ye ought to submit your Will to His, and neither to censure, nor quarrel his ways, but say, as *Psal. 18. 29* This is the doing of the Lord, and marvelous in our Eyes. I remember what is recorded that Luther said to Melancton, when he was ready to censure the Times as seeming to threaten the ruine of the Church, *Monendus est iste Philippus ut desinat esse mundi gubernator. Let Melancton cease (says he) to govern the World.* Men when they overlook a supreme over-ruling Hand at the Helm of Providences, are ready to censure them. It was a severe Construction that Porphyry put upon the Israelites passing through the Red-Sea, and the Egyptians being drowned, That they took the advantage of a low Water, as if the Ebb there had ever been so great or better known to strangers than Natives. And *Neb. 4. 2* What do these feeble Jews? And 6. If ye would understand the Times, ye must not take a light overly view of them, but ye must look attentively upon them, and pry into them, *Psal. 107. 23.* ye must look and look again on them. His Works are sought out (*Psal. 111. 2.*) of them that take pleasure in them. Ye must look both sides (to speak so) of this Book, and ye will find what is dark on the one side of the Leaf is clear on the other; on the one side ye may perceive nothing but Wrath, Trouble, Confusion, Hell, Death, &c. but if ye will turn over, ye may see, Love, Peace, Order, Heaven, Glory, yea, ye must wait upon the time of bringing forth, and patiently expect the result; for what ye see not now, ye shall see hereafter: Times are with Child of many Truths and Dispensations, and there is a Month of bringing forth, and here is the Faith and Patience of the Saints.

Doct. 2. That the right understanding of Times is very contributive to the clear discovery, and seasonable performance of the proper duties which are called for in these times.

That I may render this Truth useful to you, I shall 1. Give you some things in the general for Explication. 2. Show you what are the proper Duties of this time and juncture we are fallen under. 3. What Motives may perswade to the diligent and serious performance of these Duties. And 4. How the right discerning of our times do contribute to the discovery and practice of these Duties: And if your time will allow, I shall make some Application of all.

I. In the general for Explication, let these things be considered. 1. Every time casteth up its proper and seasonable Duties; and not only the lustre and beauty

beauty of Duty, by imbracing the right season of it, is made to shine as an Apple of Gold in a Picture of Silver, but much of the success or disappointment of it depends upon the right timing of it; Every thing, saith Solomon (*Eccles. 3. 11.*) is beautiful in its season; mis-timed Duties as they are uneasie to others, and unacceptable to God, so are they of dangerous consequence both to the Church and Persons themselves. 2. As every time, so every Person in the Church and State have proper Duties incumbent to them, according to their several Capacities, Stations and Talents, for advancing the glory of God, and securing their own Happiness. and in order thereto, particularly for preservation and transmitting of the Gospel and its Ordinances to Posterity, that through your care, the Children that are yet unborn may praise his Name. 3. The Lord doth ordinarily Spirit some men for the Duties of their time, and in a more than ordinary way furnish them with Gifts and Endowments, for their Generation-work, elevating them above what they are in ordinary, and raising their Spirits (*Dan. 11. 32.*) to do exploits, making the feeble as David, and the weak as an angel of God. 4. It's rare to find Acting and Duties of Times single and pure without the woful mixture of Self-Interest, a sour Leaven that hath spoiled many glorious Actions and heavy Sufferings: But of this more hereafter, and therefore ye will find the duty of Self-denial put in the midst (*Luk 9. 23.*) betwixt Doing and Suffering, to shew that none of them can be cleanly without it. 5. In the point of Duty and Acting, Times and Providences are not to be our Rule, Sin is still Sin, and Duty is still Duty, tho Providences seem sometimes to favour the one and discountenance the others; for as *Eccles. 9. 2.* there is one event to the Righteous and to the Wicked, &c. and therefore make the Word, and not single Providence, the Square of your Duty, Providences alone without the Word are dangerous Guides. And 6. Tho there be ordinarily a strong inclination and bent in our Friends towards Acting, yet the Church hath ever thriven better under Suffering than Acting. *Acts. 11. 21.* And as their Prayers and Tears have been their best Armour, so their Testimony and Blood hath been their greatest Trophies and Victory, *Rev. 12. 11.* They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives unto death.

II. I presume, by vertue of my Commission from the King of kings, to lay before your Grace their Majesties High Commissioner, and this Honourable House of Parliament, these particular Duties, which our Times, being well understood, obviously call for, and shall make no other Apology for my freedom in pressing them, than the obligation that lies on me to be zealous for the Lord of Hosts; and as I was never before (being but as one born out of time) in such a Capacity, so may be I never again have the opportunity of preaching before such an Honourable Auditory. (1.) Our Times upon a narrow and spiritual search call aloud to this Duty, that in a reeling and uncertain time, every one should secure their Souls, and put that in sure keeping, *1 Pet. 4. 19.* Wherefore let them that, &c. com-
mit

mit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing as unto a faithful Creator. The excellency of the Soul, the price Christ payed for Souls, the pains that Satan takes to destroy these, and the irreparableness of the loss, not being to be made up by gaining the whole world, plead strongly for this; and the Souls of great ones being within the reach of that word, 1 Cor. 1. 26. *Not many wise, not many noble,* and obvious to greater and more Temptations, are in greater hazard than others. And therefore in this uncertain time, I obtest you, that ye secure your Souls, by getting an Interest in Christ Jesus, that lose what ye will, ye may not lose that, which cannot be recovered at the rate of all the World, and that if times of trouble come upon you, ye may not be both afflicted here, and damned hereafter. (2) That ye guard against Apostacy and Defection from the Truth and Way of God (wherein he hath mercifully engaged you) by falling into Idolatry, Profanity and Opposition, to the righteous ways of God, 1 Joh. 5. 21. *Little Children keep your selves from idols*; and be not of them that draw back, (Heb. 10. 39) least his Soul take no pleasure in you; for few Apostates recover, or if they do many of them have bitter Agonies of Spirit, and are a very Hell to themselves before they be put among the Children again. And if Popery and other Corruptions now cast out by you, be embraced again, they will bring with them seven worse Spirits than before; O do not sweep the House (Matth. 12. 44.) for the Devil will return again: and it will be a strange thing to see rational men, (let be profane Christians) so prodigal of their Souls, Consciences, Relations, Estates and Lives, as to thirst and long to be back again to Egypt, have ye forgot the Burden and Bondage ye were formerly under? will ye again return to Babylon? for the Lord's sake, hate the Whore and all her Rags spotted with the Flesh. tremble to think what may be the sad Consequence of returning again with the Dog to the Vomit, and with the Sow to the Puddle; That's a severe word in Jer. 24. 20. *If ye forsake the Lord and serve other gods, then he will turn and do hurt, and consume you after that he hath done you good.* (3.) Labour to perfect the Reformation you have happily begun, and is greedily expected. And that first of all, and in the first place, Command (as in Ez. 7. 23.) that whatsoever is commanded by the God of Heaven, be diligently done for the House of the God of Heaven. Reformation ought to be thorow, and not by halves or sinful mixtures. Hos. 7. 8. *It's a sad mark put upon Samaria, 2 King. 17. 33. That they feared the Lord, and served their own gods. And swearing by God, and by Malcham,* (Zeph. 1. 5) calling the Stretching out of his arm still with fury against a Nation; it's a reproach to a People to halt between God and Baal, 1 King. 18. 21. *If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him.* And it's a perpetual stain upon Jehu's Reformation: That tho he destroyed Baal and his Priests, &c. yet he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, to wit, the Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel, 2 King. 10. 28, 29. Let Reformation, I say, be perfect, and throw to the Door all

belongs to the Whore, even the rags she hath left behind her, for an errand to return
 again: And let none of *Babels* cursed Timber or Stones be taken to build the Lord's
 House with. And let it be done speedily, *Ezra* 6. 13. They went about the
 building of the Wall speedily. Let it not be put off by carnal Policy, or worldly
 respects, saying, as *Hag.* 1. 2, 4. *It is not time to build the Lord's House, the time*
is not come. Tho I confess there is a vast difference betwixt pious Prudence, which
 should order all your Affairs, and carnal Policy, which will but defile and marre
 your Work. For men may apprehend, that if they should go on to the settling of
 the Government of the Church, or any piece of Reformation presently, many would
 fall off, and affairs would not succeed so prosperously. But let me perswade you,
 that you will find the contrary to be true, if ye will consider, 1. That the Policy of
 this kind which *Jeroboam* used, *1 King.* 12. 26. And which the *Jews* followed,
2 Chron. 11. 28. Brought the same very evils upon them which they feared, and thought
 their carnal Policy to avoid; For *Jeroboam* had laid down this Principle, *That*
Idol, no King, even as some conclude with as little reason, *No Bishop, no King.*
 And the *Jews* were by their carnal wisdom fixed in this, That Christ and the Go-
 spel, and their peace and safety could not consist together: But both their mea-
 sures failed them, and that which they feared, and thought by their carnal Policy
 to evade, came upon them. 2. If ye will consider that good King *Hezekiah* was
 misguided by this carnal Policy in his Reformation, *2 King.* 18. 4. But in the first
 year of his reign (which I pray and hope our King shall make the parallel of) re-
 moved the high places, brake down the images, cut down the groves, and brake in
 pieces the brazen serpent, (tho *Moses* made it) and called it *Nehushtan.* And
 that which in this Affair was his best Policy, ye have in the 5 verse, *He trusted in*
the Lord God of Israel. And 3. If ye will consider what *Luther*, that famous
 Reformer saith, That there are three great hinderances of Reformation, *Security*
among the people of God, secret treachery of enemies, and carnal policy in managers
of the work. For to offer to cure the disorders of the Church by carnal wisdom,
 and to determine the great controversies of Religion by humane Reason, is *cum ra-*
tione & sapientia insanire, to go mad with Wisdom and Reason. And I have read
 what *Livy* saith, That carnal policies are in their contrivement pleasant, in their
 management difficult, and in their issue sad to them that use them, and will leave
 them with that sad lamentation of that great Politician *Tully*, whose Policy had kept
 him in Place and Honour, (if I remember) in the time of four Emperors, yet at
 the end cryed out, *O me miserum, & nunquam beatum.* It must needs then be a
 wicked Maxim which some Father upon *Matchiavel*, *That all the Laws and things*
of God are to be subjected and stoop to (that which they call) Reason of State.
 4. It's a duty of our times, if we understand them right, to crucifie that
 grand Idol *Self*; and all self-ends and interests, when they come in competition
 with Christ and his Truth, and when the case is, *Christ or Barabbas.* O! How
 many

many worship this Idol Self. *Phil. 2. 21. All seek their own, not the things of Jesus Christ.* But the voice of our times to you, *Most noble Patriots*, is, not to seek great things for your self with *Baruch, Jer. 45. 5.* But with *Mordecai, Esth. 10. 3.* To seek always the wealth of your people, and labour for a more publick Spirit: *Moses* and *Paul* seem to lay their Soul and part of Heaven in Pawn for the glory of God, and delivering of the Church. Will ye prefer your little stock to the safety of the whole Cargo and Vessel? O cursed self, away with it, away with it, crucifie it, crucifie it. You were lately by a great Light of this Church, exhorted to prefer *Jerusalem* to your chief joy; and I hope the Impression of it abideth with you. For 1. It is a Spring and Source of many evils, from whence flows out Pride, Ambition, Covetousness, Vanity, &c. but from this? They are all the Children of this cursed Mother, and if ye do not slay this Idol, ye will not have heart to lift at the fallen Tabernacle, or to help to set on the Crown on Christ's Head, 2. It is the fostering and feeding of this idol Self, that is the sad occasion of all those breaches, divisions and animosities that are amongst a people; for according to the frame of their Idols, so are all their Methods taken, and some have an Idol of one shape, and some of another, and according to that Mould, so are all their doings to support it. And 3. This selfish disposition and temper, as it doth cause the enemy to blaspheme, and opens the mouths of the wicked to say, lo this is the man that pretended so highly for Christ, now he hath left him, when he hath drawn his Stake, or he hath left him because he cannot mount up to preferment that way, and gain nothing from that quarter; so hath it provoked the Lord to cut down these self-interests, that men have preferred to Christ, and his Interest, how many Crowns hath this made to totter, and fall to the ground, because they sought Crown to themselves, and not to Christ. And how many great and fair houses have been laid waste, because they built their own Houses, and let the House of the Lord ly desolat. *Jehu* his self-ends (*Hos. 1. 4.*) brought ruin upon him and his House, and all his policy could not prevent it; he that saves himself this way, shall lose himself. 5. They that rightly understand our times, will find that moderation, and sobriety is one of the great duties of it, *Phil. 4. 5. Let your moderation be known to all men, &c.* Winding up of Instruments to the highest Peg, doth not only marre the Harmony, but breaketh the Strings. Let not the Stretches of former times, edge you to the same Methods. You know who it was, who being inquired, what was the best way of governing Kingdoms? wrot only in return upon a large Paper, at a great distance from other, three times, *Modus, Modus, modus*, moderation, moderation, moderation. The Records of experience show us, that violent Administrations, and running things to the height, have not been long-lived, *Omnis felicitas ad culmen producta Retrogreditur, & nihil violentius durat.* And 6. The Duty of our Time seems to be, that ye should lay such sure and lasting Foundations, as not only these two strangers in our Land, *Righteousness* and

(*Psal. 85. 10.*) may meet and kiss one another; but that they may live together, and may be perpetuated to the generations to come, that the Children unborn may bless you; As we in this time do bless you in the Name of the Lord, and from the House of our God, for what ye have done already. Go on, I say, against whatsoever opposition, either from Enemies, or false Builders, and lay such a sure Basis, that after-Generations may build upon it: hear the word in *Zech. 8. 9.* *Let your hands be strong, ye that hear in these dayes, the words by the mouth of the Prophets, which were in the day that the foundation of the house of the Lord was laid, that the Temple might be built.*

III. Let me press these Duties of our times upon you by some Motives. 1. The concerns ye have among your hands in this time are great, your Grace, and this honourable Court of Parliament, have not only the Matters of an Earthly King, whom God hath singled out to do Exploits for him among your hands, for which ye are obliged, (as ye have already done) to evidence a great deal of care and labour; but ye have under your care and tutory *Christ's own Bride*, she is a tender virgin, and hath yet but little Breasts, she hath been wounded in the house of Friends, as well as by Enemies, and she is not yet healed, her Wounds are yet bleeding, for the Lord's sake prove to her as the compassionate *Samaritan*, *Luke. 10.* *Bind up her Wounds, pour Oyl into them, and take care of her; she is nobly Born, she is a King's Daughter, (Psal. 45. 13.) new come from her nuptialment; and for her Father's Blessing, for her Bridegroom's Blessing, and for her own Blessing, who is ready to perish, deal kindly with her, and be faithful tutors to her.* Yea, ye have *Christ's Crown*, his Glory among your hands, and ye must not take away, or suffer one Jewel of it to be lost or robbed, not only your Estates and Lives, but your Souls may go for it; for he will not give his Glory to another, nor suffer any to wear a Pearl of his Diadem, without evidences of his anger and Displeasure against them. 2. Remember, that though ye be as Gods, (*Psal. 82. 6.*) yet ye must dy as men, your Breath is in your Nostrils, as other men, and therefore carry so in the Trust ye have among your hands, as that ye may be desired when ye live, and lamented when ye die. A Heathen could say, *bonam famam serva vero, sat ero Felix*; and there was not any thing more reckoned a plague among the Heathens, than to die unlamented, and their memorial to be buried in obscurity, or remain in Infamy: And I believe there is not a man in this House, who would not think himself extremely miserable to be with *Jehoiachin* (*Jer. 22. 19*) buried with the burial of an Ass: Think but seriously what an Epitaph may be Written on your Tomb, and what Discourses may be of you when ye are gone, *Here lies a man that was never a Friend to Christ or his Interest;* now he is dead, but he was an opposer and persecuter of Christ, his Truth and people. I have read of *Lewis the 11. King of France*, that he counterteized himself to die, to see if his Court would lament him, and honour his Death with Tears, or if that they would rejoyce that they were freed of such a Governour.

our. It certainly concerns you to acquit your selves faithfully in your Trust, that ye may live *desired*, and die *lamented*, and to have the Generation following you to the Grave with such a *Lamentation*, 2 King. 2. 12, *Ah! my father, the Warriors of Israel, and the Horse-men thereof*; and to remember what that great Cardinal *Wolsey* said, when dying, *That if he had served God as faithfully as he had served the King, he had not been in that misery.* And dying is not all, but ye must give an account of your *Stewardship*, and *Talent*, and *Duties* belonging to this *prestation*, in which ye are placed, and the opportunities of doing service to God now put in your hands, and what will ye say when ye shall be sifted at the general Assize before the Tribunal of Christ, to that question, what *Justice* and *Vote* ye gave to me and my afflicted Church in the first Parliament of King *William* and Queen *Mary* in *Scotland*, was ye for me or against me? 3. Though ye should live the course of Nature, yet ye may never have so fair an opportunity to do good in your time, as ye have this day, for it's rare for a Man to be twice *Commissioner*, and but few are twice chosen to be *Members* of Parliament, of those who come in by choice, and to whom it is not *Hereditary*; and this calls you, while there is a price in your hand (*Prov. 17. 16.*) to do good, labour to have a heart to it, that is, *seriousness*, *diligence*, *affection*, *courage* and *resolution* for the work that God hath put in your hands, and carry so as ye may be free from *sad Reflections*, and *after-Challenges*, and *late-Repentings*, for *stultum est dicere non putabam.* And 4. To persuade you to these Duties of the time, consider that the Lord is aloft, and mounted on his Conquering Horse, (*Rev. 6. 2.*) to do for you, do ye not perceive him discovering the Plots, defeating the Counsels, and giving you *Victory* over your enemies, breaking them on their high places and making them fall in the pits they digged for you, *Higgaion, Selah.* And since he is so visibly, and graciously doing for you, will ye not do for him? I shall now add in the 5 and last place, That as the eyes of the Lord, his holy *Angels*, and his People in this Land, yea of all the Protestant Churches are upon you. So are upon the wings of the Prayers of the flower of the godly in *Scotland*, and wait for a return, and in hopes of it, we will sing *Salvation* to our God, and to the Lamb.

F I N I S.

